

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE ROBERT S. McNAMARA

INTERVIEW WITH FRED HOFFMAN OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

IN THE WASHINGTON STAR

WASHINGTON, D. C.

FEBRUARY 10, 1963 (Interviewed on January 23, 1963)

QUESTION: Some critics contend that under your administration of the Defense Department, the views of professional military leaders have been given too little weight, and that some of your civilian aides, those sometimes called the Whiz Kids, are operating in strategy and other areas that should properly belong to the generals and admirals. How do you feel about this criticism?

ANSWER: I think it is absolutely unfounded. I say that because I believe if you were to ask the Chiefs their views on this question, they would tell you that never before in the history of the Department have the Chiefs of Staff ever participated as fully, as completely, and as freely in the discussions of the strategy, the military force requirements, and the financial budget as they have this year. This is the statement that they have made to me, and to others, and I think it completely refutes the allegations that are sometimes made to the contrary.

QUESTION: On one matter involving the Joint Chiefs, we understand they favored continuing the SKYBOLT missile and moving toward production of the NIKE-ZEUS antimissile. To what extent were these military views taken into account before your decision was made?

ANSWER: Normally I think it is unwise to discuss publicly the views of individual chiefs, and I will not do so in this case although such discussion has already taken place in the press, and some of the accounts have been misleading.

In view of this, I will say that the Chiefs did not report a unanimous decision nor unanimous recommendation on either of the projects you refer to, the SKYBOLT missile or the NIKE-ZEUS. Instead, in each instance, their views reflected a split of opinion among them. I think this perhaps is natural and to be expected. In each instance, however, the views both pro and con of the Chiefs and others, as a matter of fact, were carefully considered by me and studied at great length before I arrived at my own recommendations, which I presented to the President.

would be assigned permanently and would not be subject to withdrawal except in circumstances of supreme national interest. This is a very limiting qualification and one that indicates that their assignment to NATO, their devotion to or inclusion in the NATO command, is far firmer than the condition that exists when a NATO member's forces are simply earmarked or committed, as is true of the great bulk of NATO forces today.

QUESTION: On this next question --

ANSWER: We want to word that carefully. There is a major difference between assignment under the conditions of paragraph 8 on the one hand, and the so-called earmarking or committing of forces. I should have brought the agreement down so I could use the exact words, but we can expand that.

QUESTION: On that next question?

ANSWER: I am not going to state whether there was or was not to have been.

QUESTION: How about the one following that?

ANSWER: Yes, go ahead. I will try to phrase an answer while you are talking.

QUESTION: Recalling the Cuban crisis of last fall, according to public statements by the Defense Department and by General David Shoup, the Marine Corps Commandant, the United States had about 100,000 Army troops in some five divisions and about 45,000 Marines earmarked for possible Cuban operations. Where would this have put us if the Communists had chosen to move simultaneously in Europe or Southeast Asia or elsewhere?

ANSWER: Without commenting on the accuracy of the figures you cite, other than to say that troops then available for contingency operations substantially exceeded the numbers you indicated, I do wish to emphasize that the actions we have taken in the past two years to build up and strengthen our conventional forces, both ground and air, were taken to insure that we have the capacity to participate in combat operations in more than one area of the world, simultaneously in more than one area of the world. Therefore, we had capabilities beyond those you have indicated.

QUESTION: If I might follow that up with one question, wouldn't our STRAC, our Strategic Army Reserve, for example, in the United States, have been cut down to a very few divisions?

ANSWER: No. As you undoubtedly know and recall, we have increased the number of combat-ready Army divisions by 45 percent since a year ago last July, and the number of divisions in Reserve today is substantial and sufficient to allow us to protect our interests in more than one area of the world at a time.

QUESTION: There are persistent reports of large numbers of ground-to-ground missiles in a generally bigger Soviet-supplied military buildup still going on in Cuba than this country has acknowledged officially. What can you say about the extent of this buildup as it stands today, and how much of a threat is it to us?

ANSWER: Based on the information available to me, I believe that there are no surface-to-surface missiles in Cuba threatening this country today. There are undoubtedly missiles in Cuba, and the reports perhaps confuse ground-to-ground intermediate range ballistic missiles on the one hand with the other types of missiles which undoubtedly are stocked in Cuba today, missiles of the following five types, for example: (1) Air defense missiles; (2) air-to-air missiles used by fighters to attack other fighters; (3) surface-to-sea missiles used for coastal defense purposes, short-range missiles used for coastal defense purposes; (4) missiles for coastal defense purposes fired from patrol-type boats; (5) ground-to-ground missiles for short range for use against troops in the field.

It is entirely probable that missiles of these classes exist in Cuba, and it seems probable that the reports that you refer to are based on that probability.

QUESTION: Again, if I could ask one brief followup question, what significance do you see in the continued presence, at least the reported presence, of up to 17,000 Russian troops and construction activity as has been described in some reports?

ANSWER: I would rather not comment on that.

QUESTION: All right. You said on a couple of occasions last year before the Cuban crisis flared that you considered the Berlin problem the most dangerous --

ANSWER: This is a real foreign policy question. I would like to talk about it, but I would rather not today, as a matter of fact.

QUESTION: On the other side of the world, recent events in South Vietnam have caused concern about the leadership of